

Interview with Richard Lockhart

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

Lockhart: On one occasion, they [the German guards] put out a requirement, anybody who wanted to go on a wood cutting detail outside the camp, and if you did you got extra rations. So I volunteered. This is in the dead of winter now, a lot of snow out there still, and I'm somewhere in one of the German forests cutting wood for the camp and suddenly I was attacked by one of the guards with a club, who hit me on the back and knocked me down, hit me a few more times while I was down and then took on a couple of other American prisoners who were working on this detail, knocked them down. There were no words spoken, no words were spoken. Apparently, the only thing we could figure out was the problem, first I thought he went berserk and I thought if he hit me in the head, he would have killed me that day. But he only hit me across the back and my body, and the others as well. We got no extra food rations by the way, and this was a bitter day, cold and heavy snow, deep in the woods, and so that was my interaction with the German guards and it was not a good one.

This beating that I took and two other men took, ended up strangely enough, in a report that was made of prisoner abuse. Senator [Dick] Durbin was able to find that in the national archives. In 1998, he provided me the report that was made to the War Crimes Commission of prisoner abuse, and I am in that narration, along with the two other prisoners. So there is, shall we say, evidence of this, and as far as I know, nothing was ever done with respect to seeking out those German guards who took us for a beating that day in the woods.

DePue: Do you have any idea why he was beating you?

Lockhart: The only thing we could figure out, because no words were spoken, the only thing we could figure out is that he didn't think we were working hard enough, fast enough. That was probably true because some of them didn't even have gloves and we were generally in a weakened condition in the first place.

DePue: I'm going to read a couple things here on what you were just referring to. Here's a letter from the National Archives, to Senator Richard J. Durbin, Dick Durbin, June 29, 1999. This is in response to your May 27, 1999 inquiry on the behalf of Richard Lockhart. And I'll skip down here.

"PFC Richard Lockhart. We have also located two affidavits, sworn by inmates of Stalag 9B, Bad Orb, Germany, which cite PFC Richard Lockhart as the victim of physical abuse at the hands of a German camp guard."

And I'll read portions of a certificate that one soldier, William Arnold Vest, Corporal. Does that name ring a bell to you?

Lockhart: Yes it does.

DePue: It says, “About fifteen January, 1945, Privates Richard Lockhart and Donald Ledum(??) and two other American soldiers working on a firewood cutting detail at Stalag 9B and were beaten and severely bruised with a rifle by a German guard, merely because he did not believe they were working fast enough. I was told those four American soldiers were marched about five miles in snow and extremely cold weather to reach the work. I actually saw the bruises on two of the victims when I talked to them afterwards. I cannot recall whether any medical treatment was given to them.” Was there?

Lockhart: No, no, there was no medical treatment given or available.

DePue: Did that slow you down? Did that cause any permanent damage or temporary damage?

Lockhart: Yes. Still at times my back hurts, which I attribute to that occurrence.

DePue: How bad were you right after that? Were you basically limited in your mobility for a while?

Lockhart: Well, I was aching for a while, yes, but I couldn’t do anything about it. There was no medical services available, shall we say. Men died in the camp every day, I do believe.

DePue: What happened when they died?

Lockhart: There was a burial detail that buried them outside the camp.

DePue: Was there a chaplain or any kind of religious service?

Lockhart: That’s a good question. There was a Catholic priest, chaplain, and a Protestant one, and they held services. It’s interesting, you get a bunch of people together and individuals will come to the surface who wouldn’t otherwise find the occasion to do so. But both of these chaplains provided religious services quite a bit. In addition, your question reminds me, there was a soldier, he was just a private but he was apparently well read, and he provided a series of I think twenty-some lectures on American history. That’s without notes, without books, without reference material, and obviously, they were well received, shall we say. There was a lot of self-encouraged resourcefulness that was evidenced in this prison camp by ordinary Americans, you might say, who had to respond to this unusual situation they found themselves in.